



Emergency Management **UPDATE**

January 2001



News Notes

Project Impact partner lauded.

General contractor J.F. "Jack" Jackson, III, recently received an outstanding individual citizen award from Rita Calvan, FEMA Region III director. Jackson was recognized for his efforts to build hurricane-resistant features into his houses in the *Project Impact* communities of Virginia Beach and Chesapeake.



Opportunity knocks.

VEMA is now taking applications for the Addison E. Slayton, Jr., Scholarship to be awarded at the 2001 Virginia Emergency Management Conference. The scholarship program was created in 1998 to assist emergency managers and others in the field in funding their college education. Interested candidates can find the application on the VDEM Web site at www.vdem.state.va.us under "What's New." The completed form must be submitted by the February 1, 2001, deadline to be considered. Contact Lynda F. Price at (804) 748-1236 for more information.

This month in Virginia storm history.

On January 4-5, 1835, Alexandria recorded -15 degrees Fahrenheit and the Potomac River froze. The Chesapeake Bay also froze down to the Virginia Capes for the first time in about 50 years. Learn more about *Virginia Winters* on our Web site at www.vdem.state.va.us/library/vawinter/va-win.htm.



Standard to create harmony in VA local EM programs

By Bob Lambert, Staff Writer

With comprehensive guidelines adopted last year, the revised National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1600 standard has changed the tempo for all-hazards emergency management to a march with a definite beat.

In February 2000, the NFPA Standards Council approved program revisions modifying the approach for emergency management and business continuity programs from recommended practices to standards.

These standards cover a diverse ensemble of players that includes public works, building, community development and land use as well as traditional emergency response personnel.

Using common standardized program elements, techniques and processes, emergency managers will conduct this new arrangement to bring harmony to mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery programs.

"The conductor doesn't necessarily have to know how to play the trombone, but he must know how it should sound," says VDEM Deputy State Coordinator George Foresman. "Now, we'll all be playing from the same sheet of music."

Foresman stresses that NFPA 1600 is more than a public safety program — it's a community program.

The National Emergency Management Association (NEMA) is adapting the 1600 standard for its new accreditation initiative for states and localities. This effort helps to promote continuous program improvement and ultimately benefits the public.



"We're adding language linking the NFPA standards to emergency management programs," says NEMA Accreditation Coordinator Emily DeMers.

"The accreditation program will measure and enhance emergency management capabilities for localities across the country."

Next year, VDEM will offer training in FEMA's Local Capability Assessment for Readiness (LCAR), based on the 1600 standard, which addresses 13 standardized emergency management functions. The self-assessment will help local governments prepare for NEMA accreditation.

More information about the revised NFPA 1600 is posted on the VDEM Web site at www.vdem.state.va.us/emupdate. Contact Emily DeMers at (859) 244-8210 or edemers@csg.org to learn more about NEMA accreditation.

Survey IDs Internet as top EM resource

A recent VDEM survey of the state's emergency management family shows no feud over the value of the Internet as a resource for effectively performing their public services duties.

With 96 percent of emergency managers responding, the "survey says" that 95 percent of local emergency managers have Internet access either at home or at the office. Nearly three out of four (74 percent) have access both at home and the office.

Eighty-three percent had visited the VDEM Web site at least once, and the largest single group of users checked the site once or twice a month. As expected, usage climbed sharply during incidents.

Most (88 percent) favored efforts to offer a wide range of products and services on the site. The initial damage assessment was the most preferred potential service to be offered via the Internet followed closely by situation reports, interactive training and hazmat reports. (The initial damage assessment form is now under development and should be field tested this month with a focus group of local jurisdictions.)

Local emergency managers rated online training registration as the most useful service provided on the VDEM Web site.



Other top-rated offerings included "What's New" and "Links."

The survey also revealed areas for continued growth such as "EM Update Online," which offers monthly local emergency manager profiles, a full-color, electronic version of the monthly *Emergency Management Update* newsletter and expanded *Update* articles and photos.

In fact, the majority of users (57 percent) did not know they could access an online version of the newsletter.

"Emergency managers are relying more heavily than ever on the enormous resources of the Internet and, during a disaster, immediate access to information is becoming a critical part of our response efforts," says VDEM Public Affairs Director Janet Clements. "We plan to continue expanding the number of



"You've got mail" on CDE programs

Starting in February, keeping up with the latest in community disaster education news, resources and programs will be a little easier. Emergency managers can now subscribe to VDEM's free monthly e-mail service.

One of the goals of the service is to help EMs learn and share information about successful community disaster education programs.

Across Virginia, EMs are using innovative and "cutting edge" programs to help their communities prepare for disasters. Severe weather expos, children's safety camps, interactive CD programs and special disaster education programs for seniors are just a few.

To subscribe to this service or contribute your success stories, e-mail Rohn Brown at rbrown@vdem.state.va.us.

resources on both the public and private areas of our Web site to meet these needs."

Complete survey results are available on our Web site at www.vdem.state.va.us/emupdate or by contacting Barbara Bowen by phone at (804) 897-6500, ext. 6511, or by e-mail at bbowen@vdem.state.va.us.



Practice makes perfect. VEOC Communications Supervisor Mike Cocker confers with Pat Williams as they receive responses from participating localities.

EMs get the message with monthly warning test

By Bob Lambert, Staff Writer

In emergency management, regular drills and exercises help to ensure we are in top form to respond to a real crisis.

Likewise, VDEM's Monthly Warning Test aids in assessing the reliability of communication pathways. The test is designed to ensure local communications centers are able to contact emergency managers quickly with vital information.

To complete the test, the emergency manager must note the code word and return an acknowledgement in the exact sequence to the Virginia Emergency Operations Center (VEOC).

All too often, however, the local coordinator does not receive the test message when the VEOC sends it through the Virginia Criminal Information Network (VCIN). VDEM Deputy Operations Director Fred Vincent says nearly one out

of five Virginia localities failed to correctly file their November 2000 test.

In a real emergency, prompt relay of information to the emergency manager is critical. Coordinating now to keep the lines of communication open can help avoid problems later.

VDEM is emphasizing the value of these tests through our quarterly Coordinator's Briefings. Vincent notes that many communities that failed to file their monthly warning test also had not attended a fiscal year 2000 Coordinator's Briefing.

The test offers an added benefit of access to the Online Emergency Operations Center on the VDEM Web site. This secure area allows you to establish two-way communication that can not only speed the transmission of vital information to your locality but also offers the option to submit reports online. *(continued on page 3)*

Anthrax: the latest bomb scare

By Patrick M. Collins, Instructor
Technological Hazards Division

Over the past few years, authorities have dealt with a series of anthrax scares across Virginia. Though these threats turned out to be hoaxes, first responders need to take them seriously because anthrax is a potentially lethal infectious bacterial disease.

Some of the delivered envelopes or packages contained an inert powder and an accompanying note warning the recipient of exposure to anthrax. Others merely contained a written statement advising the reader of the presence of anthrax, although no foreign substance was found. Nationally, more than 400 anthrax hoax letters have been reported since the late 1990s. To date, none have contained any anthrax spores.

Anthrax, a naturally occurring infectious disease caused by the spore-forming bacterium, *Bacillus anthracis*, infects livestock including sheep, cattle, horses, goats and pigs. Although anthrax may be transferred to humans through skin exposure, spore inhalation or ingestion, it is not contagious. No cases of human-to-human infection have been reported.

In the unlikely event a letter or package contains actual anthrax spores, contamination would be localized to the immediate area. The chance of the letter or package containing infectious anthrax spores is very remote.

If the delivered envelope or package remains sealed, first responders should not take any action except to notify the VEOC at (800) 468-8892 or (804) 674-2400 (local). VDEM will contact the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Quarantine, evacuation, decontamination and chemo-prophylaxis efforts are not needed as long as the envelope or package remains unopened.

If the package is opened and you handled the item, wash your hands with soap and water. Have medical personnel assess your potential exposure. Isolate the area and treat it as a crime scene.

VDEM has developed three training courses that deal with terrorism. To schedule a class or learn more about the terrorism training program, contact Patrick M. Collins by e-mail at pcollins@vdem.state.va.us or phone at (804) 897-6500, ext. 6568.

An expanded text version of this article is on our Web site at www.vdem.state.va.us/emupdate. Click on www.vdem.state.va.us/library/terrorismcourses.htm for a synopsis of available courses.

Warning Test (continued from page 2)

With the December 2000 test, VDEM began offering the option of submitting replies through the Online EOC along with the conventional faxes and mail-in forms.

"The Monthly Warning Test helps ensure that local Public Safety Answering Points relay vital information to their local emergency manager during an emergency," says Vincent. "Everyone should participate to determine whether the system is fully functional in your locality. If you wait until a disaster, it's too late."

For further information, contact Fred Vincent at (804) 674-2407, or by e-mail at fvincent@vdem.state.va.us.



School safety: It's in the plan for Stafford

By Bob Lambert, Staff Writer

Stafford County was reviewing its revamped school crisis plans last spring when emergency managers got a real-time opportunity to see whether their ideas really would work. They did.

A ground short caused a 300-amp transformer at the Moncure Elementary School in North Stafford to explode, nearly killing an electrician and starting a fire, which was quickly brought under control. The children were moved to a nearby school where they attended classes while their school was cleaned and repaired.

The fire was not a drill but an actual event. When the alarms went off, school, sheriff, fire and rescue personnel put their not-quite-finished response procedures to the test.

"We had enough of it in place to make the proper moves," says Chuck Thompson, Stafford County emergency services coordinator. "The incident really motivated us to keep going with our crisis training program. It got everybody's attention."

Developed after the Littleton, Colo., high school shootings, the new plans established standardized procedures for the entire county school system. Now **code red** means the same thing in each school and everyone knows what to do regardless of where the incident occurs. For transfer teachers, substitutes and those teaching at several locations, consistency is critical in literally taking the right steps to safety.

"All our plans are standardized," says Thompson. "Our system remains consistent irrespective of the individual school or personalities. It also establishes a certain level of expectation on behalf of emergency response personnel."

With guidance from Cindi Causey, now VDEM Region II coordinator, School Resource Officer Robin Butler, School Security and Safety Officer Greg Martin, and Assistant Superintendent of Schools David Marsh began working on the new plan in April 1999.

By last June, they were finished and training was completed throughout the system by year's end. Refresher courses and sessions for new teachers assure that everyone is familiar with what to do. Now, whatever the crisis – fire, hazmat, school violence – the basic response in a school is the same: *get the students and their teachers to safety*. When Stafford County children are on vacation next spring, emergency and school personnel will take part in a full-scale school crisis drill.

"Our exercise will be a composite of lessons learned from the Littleton school shootings," Thompson says. "We're also looking at the exercise Prince William County ran this past summer."

Involving all crisis responders in the planning process is crucial. "If you are to have a small amount of success," Thompson says, "you have to bring all the stakeholders to the table."

Assistance in developing a standardized plan may be as close as a neighboring jurisdiction. "Just remember you're not alone. There's a lot of help available. Look around and learn from others. Our plans have been well received and got a real baptism of fire."

For further information, contact Chuck Thompson at (540) 658-8684, or by e-mail at cthompson@co.stafford.va.us.

Training Calendar

Emergency Management

Exercise Design

January 9-10/Richmond

Hazardous Weather and Flooding Preparedness

January 23-25/Virginia Beach

Principles of Emergency Mgmt.

February 6-8/Williamsburg

Basic Public Information Officer Course

February 21-23/Williamsburg

ISC/EOC Interface

February 27-28/Newport News

Reservist Training

**Media Awareness Workshop/
Asking for Help/VEOC Tabletop
Exercise** - January 9/Richmond

Search and Rescue

SAR Council

January 20, 2001/Richmond

GSAR Institute (Part I)

January 26-28/Blue Ridge

GSAR Institute (Part II)

February 23-25/Blue Ridge

Technological Hazards

Hazmat Technician

January-March 2001/Wise County

Public Safety Response to

Terrorism - Mgmt. Considerations

January 30 - February 2/Washington,
D.C. (Contact: Patrick Collins at
pcollins@vdem.state.va.us)

Conference covers full EM picture

From severe weather to wildfires to aircraft crashes, the Virginia Emergency Management Conference, March 14-16, will help participants improve their capabilities to deal with a wide variety of disasters.

Focusing on the theme, "Making the Connection," the three-day session at the Williamsburg Marriott will emphasize the importance of communication and coordination among government, private sector, volunteer and other organizations as they face disasters and emergencies.

National Hurricane Center Director Max Mayfield will open the meeting with an assessment of hurricane forecasting techniques. Other featured topics include:

- "Lightning safety"
- "Wildfire: Shenandoah National Park — November 2000"
- "Violence in the workplace"
- "Aircraft down in your town"

A panel of Virginia meteorologists will discuss the influence of TV meteorologists on disaster response. Kristin Dodd, on-camera meteorologist for The Weather Channel, will discuss her severe weather reporting experiences during the awards luncheon.

Workshops will cover weather science, creative approaches to disaster education and response, community-wide recovery efforts and outstanding local emergency activities. A one-day pre-conference session March 13 will provide emergency management technology updates and demonstrations.

The registration fee for the program, sponsored by VDEM and the Virginia Emergency Management Association, is \$135. The pre-conference technology session will cost \$85.

Conference information is available on the VDEM Web site at www.vdem.state.va.us or by contacting Mary Powell, Conventions Plus, at (757) 474-3096 or by e-mail at mary.powell14@gte.net.



Geriatrics to gridlock: the NOVA EM challenge

Northern Virginia's Fairfax County has a large number of elderly citizens in assisted-living or retirement facilities.

Current evacuation standards applying to fires only cover getting residents safely out of the building. What about storms or hazmat incidents? That's just one of many problems Fairfax Deputy EM Coordinator Alexandra T. Craig has to deal with in Virginia's most densely populated county.

Read her profile on our Web site at www.vdem.state.va.us/emupdate/profiles/craige.htm to learn more about how she got into emergency management and how she views the area's emergency services tasks.



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